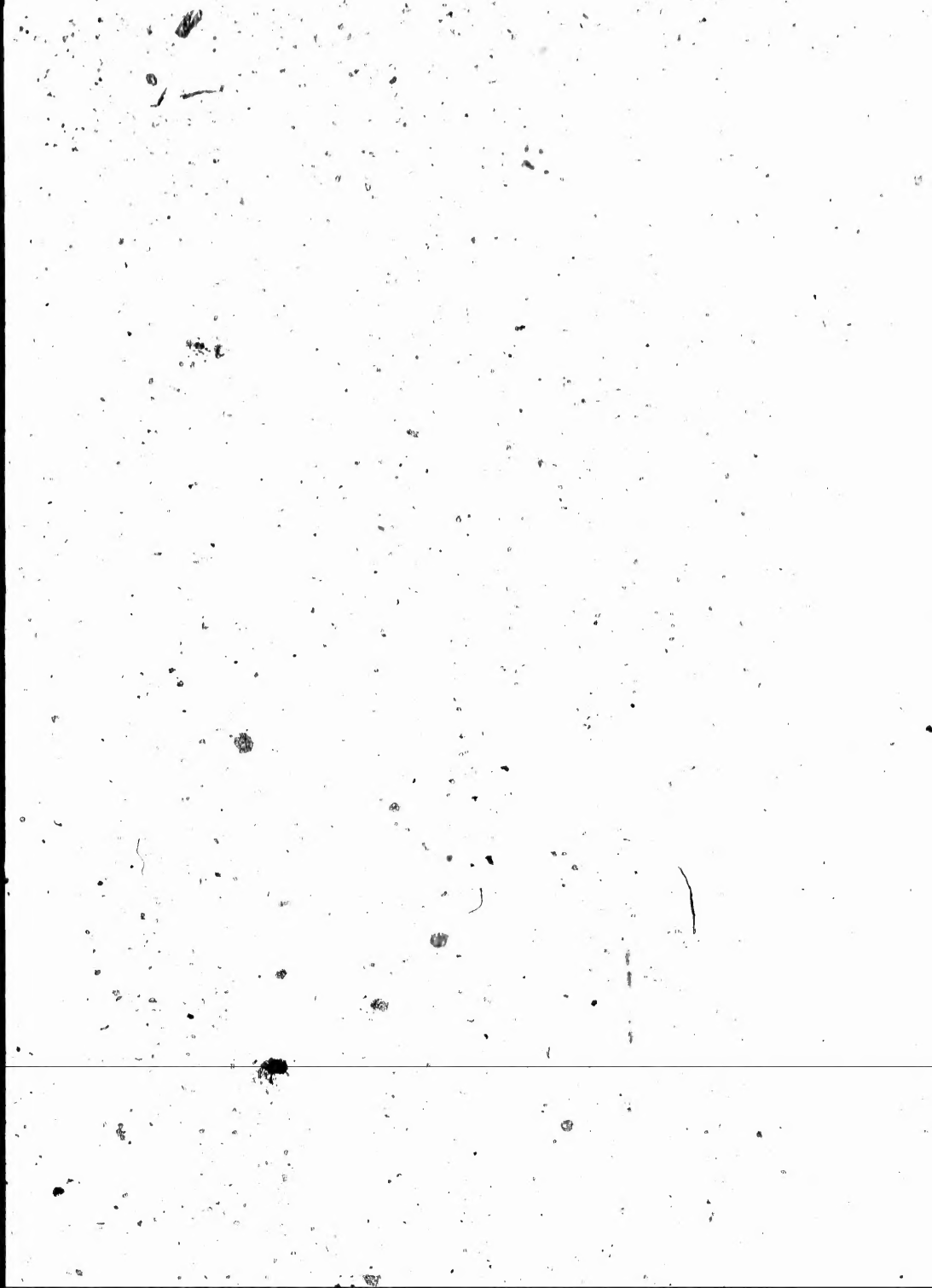
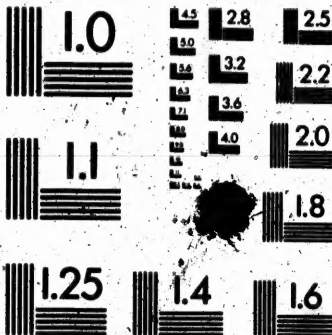




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GOD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS CHURCH.

A SERMON, PREACHED BY

323.

REV. A. A. DRUMMOND, SHAKESPEARE, C.W.

MODERATOR OF THE U. P. SYNOD, IN THE U. P. CHURCH, MONTREAL, ON THE EVE OF TUESDAY, 4TH
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GOD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS CHURCH.

"My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. And he said unto Hlm, If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence."—Exod. xxxiii. 14-15.

Go forward is the command of God to his people. Follow where duty leads; shrink not from it, because it is arduous, nor keep back because there are difficulties in the way. "He sendeth no man at any time at his own charges." He accompanies the command with the promise,— "my presence shall go with thee." It was thus he spake to the children of Israel, when journeying to Canaan; it is thus he speaks to his people still, when engaged in any special enterprise for the glory of God, or when performing the grand work of the Christian life.

We do not stay to review the occasion, interesting though it be, on which these words were first spoken. We appropriate the language to the true Israel in all ages. The presence of God with his people is a prominent feature of the New Testament Church—more enlarged, and enriching and abiding, than under former dispensations, and therefore our text may, with great propriety, be applied to the Church of God and her work in the present age, and we at once proceed to examine it in this light.

The presence of God with his Church—the Church's estimate of his presence—the church's desire for its continued enjoyment—the church's guarantee that this desire will be gratified and his promised presence, a pledge and foretaste of future rest, are the main topics suggested by our text; and may His presence aid and direct us, to a clear understanding and proper improvement of them, while we endeavour, in humble dependence on his help, to examine the important truths, thus presented for our consideration.

I. THE PRESENCE OF GOD WITH HIS CHURCH.

Omnipresence is a grand attribute of Jehovah. He is present in every part of the universe—in heaven—on earth—in hell, with angels and with devils, with

saints and with sinners. The psalmist enquires, "whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? if I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there; if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." But it is not in respect of his essence, we now view this expression, there is another sense in which it is understood—as implying a special privilege, enjoyed by His people and by none else. God gave two sensible manifestations of Himself to ancient Israel, in the pillar of fire and of cloud, that went before them in their journeyings; and in the Shekinah that overshadowed the mercy seat; but these were only temporary accommodations and were by and by discontinued, so that the Jews must regard this promised presence in a higher sense, than any outward and visible manifestation. While it included his special providential dispensations toward them,—such as providing for their wants—defending them from enemies—delivering them out of danger and directing them in difficulty, it referred particularly to his peculiar love to them in owning them as his people and in making all things work together for their good. In our Lord's valedictory discourse as recorded by John in the xiv. chapter of his gospel, this presence is explained of the Holy Spirit. He assured his disciples, that "he would pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him, for he dwelleth in you and shall be in you." "he that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me, and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will

love him and will manifest myself to him. Judas said unto him, 'not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us and not to the world; Jesus answered and said unto him, if a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him.' The promised presence of God, then, is not bodily, material, or visible; it is spiritual, felt and enjoyed in the soul. Yet it is not without its manifestations; the rich blessings it imparts tell where it is—the peace and joy—the comfort and encouragement—the support and succour, in a word all that distinguishes God's people from the men of the world, are pleasing evidences of his presence. "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God."

Wherever this spiritual presence is realized, the soul feels as if inspired and sees God, wise, good and glorious in all around; in the dew drop that sparkles in the morning sun, and in the snowflake that falls so softly on the grave of autumn—in the gentle breeze and in the furious storm—in the clear blue sky and in the dark and lurid cloud—in the tiny flower and tender herb and stately tree—in the insect of the breeze, and bird upon the wing, and the ranger of the forest—in all, he sees God revealed, as he had never seen him before; nor are only things around thus seen differently; the Bible is like another book, its truths are clearer, richer, holier, happier than before. The glory of God fills the soul, sanctifying every feeling and faculty. A growing likeness to the Holy One manifests itself in his heart and life, and verifies the declaration of the Saviour, "I in them and they in me." What a blessing! God dwelling with man on earth in very deed. We cannot yet, until our work is done, ascend up to Heaven, to his holy habitation there, but he graciously condescends and comes down to dwell with us here, and if when an earthly prince visits the distant part of his dominion and there sojourns for a night, nothing is heard, but one loud, and united and enthusiastic burst of loyalty, shall God himself come down and dwell in our midst by his Spirit—*dwell*, I say, not pay a transient visit, but take up his abode with us, and the honor

conferred be lost sight of and the blessing not highly prized.

II. THE CHURCH'S ESTIMATE OF GOD'S PRESENCE.

If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. This is not to be understood as a hypothetical statement, as if the speaker had any doubts on the subject, after God had promised, but rather as a very strong way of expressing the truth, that he regarded God's presence as absolutely necessary to success.

1. His presence, indeed, is regarded as necessary to the very vitality of the Church. In Eden he fashioned man from the dust of the earth, but until he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, he was not a living soul: the body may be gorgeously robed and decked with sparkling jewels, but these do not impart life; so a collection of people without the presence of God is not the Church; they may be numerous, united and wealthy, but unless God be in their midst, they cannot be regarded his people; his presence alone can impart life.

2. His presence is regarded as necessary to success in any undertaking. Moses would not take one step alone; he felt that God must go with him; and this has ever been regarded the true secret of success.

Except the Lord do build the house,
The builders lose their pain;
Except the Lord the city keep,
The watchmen watch in vain.

This is significantly acknowledged in the earnest and continued prayers of his people for divine aid. Prayer precedes and accompanies all the efforts put forth by a prosperous church. When the first missionaries, Barnabas and Saul, were sent forth, God's presence was invoked; they were recommended to the grace of God for their work, and when they had returned and were giving a report of their labors, they rehearsed all that *God had done* with them, and how *He* had opened a door of faith unto the Gentiles. In going forth against the enemy and seeking to rescue the heathen from their degradation and misery, they knew that the work was too great for man, no human might, nor power was able for it, God's spirit alone could give the needed blessing—they might plant and water, but the increase must come from the Lord. And this necessity is re-

cognised by the people of God; everywhere and always they regard the continued presence of God as the grand essential to success in all their labors for the advancement of Messiah's kingdom.—While this high estimate of God's presence with his church is founded upon the sure word of God, yet it is pleasingly confirmed by the experience of his people in the past. When He is with her, she prospers, strengthens her stakes and lengthens her cords, and shoots forth to the right hand and to the left. Look for example, at that branch of the church with which it is our privilege to be connected, (and we select it, not because the same may not be found in other branches, but because you may not be so familiar with their history.) Witnessing against error, the four brethren came out from the Established Church of Scotland and formed themselves into a separate and distinct association. They trusted in God and he was with them, and soon gave unmistakable proof of his presence. Others beholding it, joined their ranks, saying "we will go with you for we know that God is with you," until in the present day, the Church numbers about 550 congregations. And what hath the Lord enabled her to accomplish? She hath borne noble testimony to the truth in the land of her birth, and she hath sent forth the gospel to other parts. Before the commencement of the present century, she had sent at least 50 ministers to the United States of America; and since then, she hath planted the standard of the Cross in Nova Scotia, Jamaica, Trinidad, Persia, Caffraria, Old Calabar, Australia, India, besides labouring for the conversion of the Jews and aiding other societies that were similarly occupied. (And it becomes us gratefully to acknowledge her early care for Canada, in planting and fostering and strengthening the United Presbyterian Church in this land. And hath not God been with us as with the parent Church? Twenty-nine winters have come and gone, since the first band of missionaries landed in Montreal: within a month, one of their number was removed by death; another, after many years of arduous toil in the Master's work—preaching from the pulpit, writing through the press, and teaching from the professorial chair—has finished his course and gone to his reward: and the

last of the band remains with us to the day, the beloved pastor of a numerous people and the honored father of the Church. Other labourers followed from year to year, and young men were trained up in the country, until at present there are over 100 congregations and between 80 and 90 ministers and preachers. What has the Lord done for us? Surely, it well becomes us, ere we lose our separate existence and unite with the sister church, to make mention of the goodness of God, and trace all our past success to his gracious presence. *Here*, where first our church lifted up her voice in this land, she is brought again, not by her own plans, but by the leadings of His providence, that she might review what things God has done for her, since she entered the country and shall we not *now* and *here* erect our *Ebenezer* and engrave on it, "hitherto hath the Lord helped us." And when we leave this city, a larger, more influential and I trust still a *united body*, shall we not cause it to be known, throughout the length and breadth of the land, that God's presence hath blessed us in the past and is with us still!

III. THE CHURCH'S DESIRE FOR GOD'S PRESENCE

If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. Whatever else these words imply, they undoubtedly express a very strong desire for the presence of God; so strong, indeed, that if not granted, he has no heart to go forward.—It is an expression like that of Jacob, when wrestling with the angel, "I will not let thee go, until thou bless me." While others may be enquiring, who will show us any good? God's people are praying, "Lord, lift thou upon us the light of thy countenance—thy favor is life and thy loving kindness is better than life." This desire they express, when from day to day they observe his ordinances and delight in doing his will; for well they know, that they need not expect his continued presence if they do not seek him in the means of his own appointing, or if they continue in a course dishonoring to him. If we sincerely respect and wish to gratify our friend, we will not thwart his well known wishes—that would be to insult him, we will not undermine his character, or injure his worldly interests,—that would be to

repel him; much more will the people of God carefully avoid any thing that would grieve the Holy Spirit and drive him from them, and so, carefully observe the well-known pleasure of the Lord. The poor mendicant often tells his wants before he has spoke a single word, his tattered garments and his beggarly features plead significantly for him; but he is not satisfied with this, in plaintive tones, he tells his story, and asks relief in words that melt another's heart and gain for him assistance. And so God's people are not content with appearing before the Lord, who beholds their defilement and guilt, but they cry to him for help, their daily prayer is, "abide with us. "O cast me not away from thy presence, take not thy Holy Spirit from me." The ancient Romans were wont to consult their oracles, before entering on any great enterprise, and they had their household gods, whose favor they might daily seek; and surely a Christian people shall not be outdone by pagans; they will not fail to acknowledge the hearer of prayer, "Acknowledge the Lord in all thy ways and he will direct thy steps." He has blessings in store, he has made ample provisions for all their wants, still he says, "For all this, I will yet be enquired of, by the house of Israel to do it for them."—And when God's people cherish this strong desire, they always find the good they seek—their prayer is as good as answered. In the nursery tales, there is a pleasing story about a wishing cap, whoever puts it on procures whatever he is pleased to ask; in the christian religion, there is also a wishing cap, and the christian who wears it well, receives exceeding abundantly, above all that he asks or thinks; and these blessings are enjoyed so long as desired and enjoyed the more, the stronger they are desired.

IV. THE CHURCH'S GUARANTEE THAT THIS DESIRE WILL BE GRATIFIED.

My presence shall go with thee. How often does disappointment darken our sky—frequently our best laid schemes prove abortive—our fondest hopes are dashed to the ground—warmest friends grow cold—nearest relatives are snatched from us—the merchant fails—the farmer's crops are blasted—the sailor is wrecked—the soldier is left on the battle-field—the politician is defeated—aye and the nation itself is brought

into deep waters, but the Church is safe—the bush burns and is not consumed. God is with his people. His promise is a sufficient guarantee. When our first parents dwelt in Eden, they were allured from the path of duty by a promise, and who of all their offspring has not been allured in a similar way, but this was the promise of the father of lies. God is the faithful promiser, has he said it and shall he not do it, has he promised and shall he not fulfill, heaven and earth shall pass away, but his word shall not pass away. He is able and he is ready to fulfil all his promises, and this one is oft repeated,—sometimes in simplest language that the child may understand it—sometimes in prophetic language to shew its absolute certainty: "Where two or three are met together in my name there am I in their midst,—lo, I am with you always even to the end of the world—no one shall pluck my people out of my hand—the gates of hell shall not prevail against my church.

Difficulties may arise; his people may be subjected to persecution; they may have to flee for their lives or they may be immured in the dungeon for their faith, and yet God is with them. When the covenanters were hunted like partridges over the mountains of Scotland, were they denied this promised presence? See them on the Sabbath morn as they meet together in the retired glen with some limpid stream gurgling along as if delighted with their presence, or on the hill side with the blue sky for their canopy, and the blooming heather for their seats, and when a Cameron, or a Renwick preached the glorious Gospel, and every heart is gushing with warmest love to Jesus and every voice joins in the song of praise to some favorite tune, making the spot a perfect paradise. Tell us, ye men of God, of whom the world was not worthy, what was the secret of your joy—the source of your happiness? Do you lead us to the fiery furnace of Nebuchadnezzar and bid us look and behold one with the three Hebrew youths like to the Son of man—do you take us to the goal at Phillippi—to the inner dungeon there and bid us listen to the song of Paul and Silas? and was their God your God—he supports and comforts you as he did them! O, what encouragement! Christian brethren you want no surer pledge than the word of the faithful promiser. The church may unfurl her banners and fight

against sin and satan, ever relying on his promised presence. She may enter more largely on Home missionary operations and send the Gospel to every nook and corner of the land, until the French speaking Canadian shall hear the story of the cross in his own tongue, and the wandering Indian shall be taught to know and love and obey the Great Good Spirit,—and the degraded African who has tossed his fetters from him when he landed on our shore and begged freedom to his breast—a long sought boon, has heard his voice who maketh free indeed—and the hardy settler of the forest shall hear from the living voice the tidings of love and mercy. She may unfurl her banners, and send her missionaries to other lands and take her place with the other churches in forwarding the good tidings through all lands, until the whole earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord. "Arise, shine, for thy light is come and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."

V. GOD'S PRESENCE A PLEDGE AND FORETASTE OF FUTURE REST.

And I will give thee rest. On this part of our subject we cannot enlarge; your time forbids me doing more than merely to indicate the train of thought we would have followed, had time permitted. In its primary application this promise may be understood as synchronous with the promise of his presence, when the church enjoys God's presence she at the very same time enjoys rest; happy is that people whose God is the Lord." Or this promise may refer to the termination of their journey and to the enjoyment that awaited them then. And the language of Joshua 1. 13, 16-21, 43, 44 would countenance this interpretation. But taking a more enlarged view of the subject, you will at once agree with me in saying, that this promise can only be regarded as receiving its grand fulfillment when the church militant becomes the church triumphant. Heaven is peculiarly a place of rest—rest from sin, and sorrow, from trouble and toil, from anxiety and distress—rest in the bosom of the beloved. Sweet is pleasure after pain. The presence of God with his people on earth is the greatest good they can enjoy here—but there is a greater good in Heaven; in thy presence is fullness of joy, at thy right hand there are pleasures for ever more. So that what is enjoyed below may be viewed

as a foretaste of the rest that remaineth for the people of God. It is also a pledge of it: when this pilot undertakes to steer the vessel, she will not split upon the rocks, nor run upon the sands, nor yield before the storm, he will see her safely into the haven of rest. God will bring his ransomed home. He will finish the good he has begun. Fear not little flock it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Goodness and mercy all my day,
Shall surely follow me;
And in God's house for ever more,
My dwelling place shall be.

In conclusion—fathers and brethren, the position we now occupy as a church is peculiarly interesting. We look back and from the small beginning we mark her onward progress to the present time. Surely God has fulfilled his promise, his presence has been with us.

We look back over the years of negotiation with the Sister Church and think of the difficulties that have been surmounted—the obstacles that have been removed—the heart-burnings and jealousies and strifes, that have been exchanged for mutual love and confidence. Surely God has fulfilled his promise, and his presence has been with us.

We look into the relationship so close and gratifying and helpful, that has subsisted between us and the mother church for over a quarter of a century, which will, to a certain extent, be broken up and we might regret the action that leads to this result, did we not feel assured that the Church in Scotland will heartily rejoice over the union and regard it, as another reward of her missionary enterprise.

And we look forward to the work still to be done in this country and note the hindrances in the way, arising from the carelessness and worldly-mindedness and skepticism of the age; and we cannot but rejoice at the prospect of having our hands greatly strengthened and our hearts encouraged and a new impetus given to ministerial and missionary zeal. O, for his presence to direct and animate us. Lord, send now prosperity.

O Saviour, let thy glory shine
And fill thy dwellings here,
Till life and love and joy divine
Make earth like Heaven appear.

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